For the experimental design, you will consider an issue about language acquisition and how hypotheses might be tested. The field of appropriate topics is large, but here are a couple of points:

- **A spontaneous-production-based (e.g., CHILDES) experiment is fine.** By “experiment” I do not mean to imply “elicitation experiment.” It would be fine to study a particular phenomenon by analyzing spontaneous production data, of the sort which is available as part of the CHILDES database.

- **L1, L2, L3 acquisition is fine.** By the time the experimental design is due, we will only have really talked about issues concerning L1 acquisition, but you are welcome to consider topics in L2 or L3 acquisition as well. If you choose to do this, you might want to skim sections of the White (2003) textbook that we’ll be using in the second half of the course for ideas, or come talk to me about more recent topics.

- **Replication of an existing experiment is fine (within reason).** If there is an existing experiment that addresses a problem you are interested in, you are welcome to borrow ideas and methodology. There should be something different between your experiment and the one that exists in the literature, and you should cite the existing study in your write-up. For example, if you think of a slightly different (hopefully, better) way to test the same thing, or if you want to test a similar hypothesis but for a different (combination of) language(s), that would be appropriate. The advantage of actually doing a replication of some kind is that you may increase your chances of finding significant results in the end.

- **You are designing an experiment that you need not perform in full.** You will almost certainly not be able to run a full-scale experiment in the time we have during this course, and you will not be expected to. This need not stop you from designing the experiment as if you will have access to large numbers of subjects of the appropriate kind. We will discuss the requirements of the experiments themselves later in the semester, but you will not need to run it on more than 2–3 subjects for the final project.

- **You are designing an experiment that you need to pilot.** The previous point notwithstanding, you *are* designing an experiment that needs to be feasible. Do not design an experiment that requires surgical extraction of the frontal lobe of your subjects, or an experiment that requires testing native speakers of Tibetan learning Navajo in a Swahili-speaking community (unless you have access to some people who would qualify as subjects).

- **The “experimental design” vs. the “final project proposal”.** On the syllabus, there are two different deadlines. October 27, 2003 is the deadline for the “experimental design” which is what this document is about. Two weeks later, on November 10, 2003, the “final project proposal” is due. Here’s what I envision: On October 27 you hand in the experimental design, which (unless you say otherwise) I will assume is also essentially a draft of the project proposal. By November 3, you get comments back from me about it, indicating what will need to be addressed to make it into a proposal for the final project. On November 10, you hand me a revised version that will be the final project proposal. If you want, you may choose to make your final project be on a
different topic than your “experimental design”, but come talk to me about what topic you might want to switch to if you think you will be doing this.

**Little details about the experimental design:**

- The experimental design should be 3–5 single-spaced pages long.
- You should address the following points:
  - What is the issue in language acquisition you are investigating?
  - What are the different hypotheses? **Note:** The competing hypotheses need to be at least *a priori* plausible; *People can’t learn German* is not a good hypothesis to try to disprove.
  - What sort of data from acquisition could decide between the hypotheses? How would this data show that one hypothesis is right and the other is wrong?
  - What is the approach you would use to get such data? Who would be your subjects? What kind of task would they perform?
  - How do you plan to analyze the data?

**It might be useful to look at the following readings as well (among others perhaps):**


